

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1-10.(Canceled)

11. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program for children ages 0 to 5 years old, comprising the steps of:

(a) developing criteria which address strengths and weaknesses of the educational program, wherein said criteria includes each of (a1) through (a3) following:

5 (a1) an educational program staff to child classroom ratio;

(a2) educational program staff education qualifications including (a2-1) through (a2-3) following:

(a2-1) qualifications for staff educational degrees,

(a2-2) qualification for duration of paid experience in educating children,

10 and

(a2-3) qualifications for college course credits in child development; and

(a3) at least a predetermined majority of parents, having a child in the educational program, responding with parental responses indicating each of the following (a3-1) through (a3-3):

15 (a3-1) the educational program welcomes visits by the parents at substantially all times;

(a3-2) receiving at least adequate information on their child's daily activities in the educational program; and

(a3-3) receiving at least adequate information from the educational program on each of (a3-3-1) through (a3-3-3) following:

20 (a3-3-1) learning goals for children in the educational program,

(a3-3-2) teaching approaches for children in the educational program,

- 25 (a3-3-3) how child behavior is managed in a classroom
 environment;
- (b) ~~observing~~ determining how the criteria [[in]]relates to the educational program,
 and storing results from said determining step for use by an electronic
 computational device;
- 30 (c) determining from said stored results, ~~assigning~~ a numerical value to the criteria
 for each of a plurality of different portions of the results;
 wherein said plurality of different portions of the results includes data for
 assigning such a numerical value to at least some of the following (c1) through
 (c5) following:
- 35 (c1) a classroom environment for the educational program;
 (c2) accreditation by one or more of: (i) a state, local, or federal institution, and
 (ii) a non-governmental association that accredits a plurality of
 independently owned and operated child care facilities;
 (c3) involvement of parents having a child in the educational program;
 (c4) educational credentials of staff at the educational program; and
40 (c5) ratios of educational program staff to children in the educational program;
 [[and,]]
- (d) using a computational device for combining said assigned numerical values for
 obtaining an overall rating for the educational program, wherein said overall
 rating designates a quality of child care;
- 45 (e) assigning [[an]]the overall rating to the educational program ~~based on the~~
 ~~numerically valued criteria;~~
- (f) providing a communications network interface for accessing the overall rating of
 the educational program; and
- (g) transmitting the overall rating to a user accessing the network interface so that the
50 overall rating can be presented to the user;

~~wherein the criteria for an early child care education program are classroom environment, accreditation of the educational program, parent involvement, staff credentials, presence of a curriculum, and staff to child ratios;~~

~~wherein the observation of the parent involvement criteria analyzes what levels and types of parent involvement exist by evaluating factors reflecting basic communication and responsibility of the parents associated with the educational program; and~~

~~wherein the factors reflecting basic communication and responsibility of the parents associated with the educational program consist of:~~

~~—— program documents providing written information on the educational program's philosophy, policies and procedures;~~

~~—— program documents orientation to the program for both parent and child prior to or immediately following enrollment;~~

~~—— program reports timely notification of major change in program of policies and a low percentage of parents report lack of timely notification;~~

~~—— a high percentage of parents report that program welcomes visits by parent at all times;~~

~~—— a high percentage of parents report at least adequate information from program on child's physical and emotional well-being;~~

~~70 ——— a high percentage of parents report at least adequate response by program to parent concerns and suggestions;~~

~~—— a high percentage of parents report at least adequate information from program on child's daily activities;~~

~~75 ——— a high percentage of parents report being somewhat comfortable asking teacher for information on child development or parenting techniques;~~

~~—— program documents conducting planned individual parent conferences at least annually to discuss child's progress and plans to meet learning goals;~~

~~—— a high percentage of parents report receiving at least adequate information from program on learning goals for children and teaching approaches;~~

- 80 ~~— a majority of parents who have offered ideas or suggestions to program report that suggestions are implemented;~~
~~— a high percentage of parents report receiving at least adequate information from the program about community services;~~
~~— program documents regularly including parents in program evaluation; and,~~
85 ~~— program staff and parents report planned, successful activities in parent involvement such as parenting, communication, participating or volunteering, learning at home, leadership or decision-making, and community involvement.~~

12-27. Canceled.

28. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program for children ages 0 to 5 years old, comprising the steps of:

- 5 (a) developing educational program criteria for evaluating the educational program ~~which address the strengths and weaknesses of the educational program;~~
(b) observing receiving data indicative of factors related to operation of in the educational programs, wherein for each of said factors, its indicative data relates being-related to one or more portions of the criteria;
(c) assigning a numerical value each to the factors, wherein for each of the factors, the corresponding numerical value is determined using the corresponding data for the factor;
10 (d) sorting the numerical values of the factors to correspond with the one or more criteria to which the factors relate;
(e) for each criterion of the criteria, averaging the numerical values of the factors to give a resulting numerical value for the criterion each criteria;
15 and,
(f) assigning an overall rating to the educational program based on the resulting numerical values, wherein said overall rating is determined by an

- 20 electronic computational device combining said resulting numerically
 ~~valued criteria~~ values;
- (g) providing a communications network interface for accessing the overall
 rating of the educational program; and
- (h) transmitting the overall rating to a user accessing the network interface so
 that the overall rating can be presented to the user;
- 25 wherein the criteria for ~~an early child care~~ the educational program ~~[[are]]~~ include
 provisions for assessing a classroom environment, accreditation of the educational
 program, parent involvement, staff credentials, presence of a curriculum, and staff to
 child ratios;
- wherein one or more of the provisions for the observation of the parent
30 involvement include identifying criteria analyzes what levels and types of parent
 involvement [[exist]] by evaluating information indicative of factors reflecting basic
 communication and interaction responsibility of the parents having a child in associated
 with the educational program with the educational program; and
- wherein the information indicative of the factors reflecting basic communication
35 and responsibility interaction of the parents associated with the educational program
 consists of at least most of (1) through (14) following:
- (1) educational program documents providing written information on the
 educational program's philosophy, policies and procedures;
- (2) educational program documents providing orientation to the educational
40 program for both parent and child prior to or immediately following enrollment;
- (3) educational program reports timely providing notification of a [[major
]]change in educational program of policies and documentation indicating that a low
 percentage of parents report lack of timely receiving such notification, wherein said low
 percentage is no more than 50%;
- 45 (4) a first high percentage of parents report that the educational program
 welcomes visits by parent at all times, wherein said first high percentage is greater than
 50%;

(5) a second high percentage of parents report at least adequate information from the educational program on their child's physical and emotional well-being, wherein
50 said second high percentage is greater than 50%;

(6) a third high percentage of parents report at least adequate response by the educational program to parent concerns and suggestions, wherein said third high percentage is greater than 50%;

(7) a fourth high percentage of parents report at least adequate information
55 from the educational program on their child's daily activities, wherein said fourth high percentage is greater than 50%;

(8) a fifth high percentage of the parents report being somewhat comfortable asking educational program staff ~~teacher~~ for information on child development or parenting techniques, wherein said fifth high percentage is greater than 50%;

60 (9) educational program documents related to ~~conducting~~ planned individual parent conferences at least annually to discuss a child's progress and plans to meet learning goals;

(10) a sixth high percentage of the parents report receiving at least adequate information from the educational program on learning goals for children and teaching
65 approaches, wherein said sixth high percentage is greater than 50%;

(11) a majority of the parents who have offered ideas or suggestions to the educational program report that ideas or suggestions are implemented;

(12) a seventh high percentage of the parents report receiving at least adequate information from the educational program about community services, wherein said
70 seventh high percentage is greater than 50%;

(13) educational program documents regularly include the ~~including~~ parents in program evaluation of the educational program; and,

(14) educational program staff and the parents report planned, successful activities in parent involvement ~~such as~~ directed to parenting, communication,
75 participating or volunteering, learning at home, leadership or decision-making, and community involvement.

29-47. Canceled.

48. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 11, wherein the overall rating is computed by averaging the numeric values ~~numerically valued criteria~~.

49. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 11, wherein the overall rating is computed by weighting the numeric values ~~numerically valued criteria~~ and averaging the weighted numeric values.

50. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 11, wherein the overall rating comprises a four-star system, with one star or less representing [[the]]a lowest rating and each successive increase in stars is indicative of a higher quality rating for the educational program, with four stars
5 representing [[the]]a highest rating.

51. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 11, wherein said step of developing includes further comprising the steps of:
placing a representation of the criteria of step (a) in an electronic database; and
5 entering said numerical values into the database once said numerical values are determined by the computational device, and,
~~calculating, within the database, the overall rating of the educational program.~~

52. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 11, wherein the ~~observation~~ step (b) of determining includes collecting educational program related data from at least some of: documents, classroom
observations, interviews with personnel of the educational program, a review of
5 credentials of personnel of the educational program, and interviews with the children

~~students and parents patronizing the educational program, surveys, and other information gathering techniques.~~

53. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 11, wherein one of the numerical values is for the observation of the classroom environment criteria of (c1), and the one numerical value is obtained from data related to at least most of (i) through (x) following: (i) includes observing space and
5 furnishings occupied by the educational program, (ii) personal care routines used by the educational program, (iii) language activities provided by the educational program, (iv) reasoning activities provided by the educational program, (v) language materials provided by the educational program, (vi) reasoning materials provided by the educational program, (vii) child care program structure provided by the educational
10 program, (viii) physical activities provided by the educational program, (ix) interaction between the staff and children in the educational program, and (x) interactions between parents of children in the educational program and the staff of the educational program.

54. (Cancel)

55. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 28, wherein the overall rating comprises a ranking having four ranks-
~~star system, wherein the ranks are linearly ordered with one star or less representing the lowest rating and four stars representing the highest rating.~~

56. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 28, wherein said step of developing includes further comprising the
~~steps of:~~

5 placing a representation of the criteria of step (a) and the data indicative of factors
of step (b) in an electronic database;
entering said numerical values of step (c) into the database; and,
calculating, within the database, the overall rating of the educational program.

57. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 28, wherein the ~~receiving observation~~ step includes collecting documents, classroom observations, interviews with personnel of the educational program, review of credentials of personnel of the educational program, interviews with
5 the students and parents patronizing the educational program, surveys, and other information gathering techniques.

58. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 28, wherein the ~~provisions for assessing observation of the classroom environment criteria~~ includes observing space and furnishings, personal care routines, language activities, reasoning activities, language materials, reasoning materials, program
5 structure, physical activities, interaction between staff and children, interactions between parents and staff.

59. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 28, wherein the ~~provisions for assessing observation of the accreditation of the educational program criteria~~ includes an analysis of whether the educational program is accredited by ~~appropriate~~ one or more of: (i) a state, local or federal institutions, and (ii) a non-governmental association that accredits a plurality of independently owned and operated child care facilities.

60. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 28, wherein the ~~provisions for assessing observation of the staff credentials criteria~~ includes an analysis of the credentials of each staff member.

61. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 28, wherein the ~~provisions for assessing observation of the staff to child ratios~~ includes an analysis of whether the educational program meets target ratios of staff to child based on age groups.

62. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 61[[28]], wherein the target ratios for an age group of 0 to 18 months of age ranges from a [[at the]] low end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 5 children, to a, ~~at~~ ~~the~~ high end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 3 children.

63. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 61[[28]], wherein the target ratios for an age group of 18 to 24 months of age ranges from a [[at the]] low end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 5 children, to, ~~at the~~ a high end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 3 children.

64. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 61[[28]], wherein the target ratios for an age group of 24 to 36 months of age ranges from a [[at the]] low end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 7 children, to, ~~at the~~ a high end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 5 children.

65. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 61[[28]], wherein the target ratios for an age group of 30 to 36 months of age ranges from a [[at the]] low end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 8 children, to, ~~at the~~ a high a end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 6 children.

66. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 61[[28]], wherein the target ratios for an age group of 36 to 48 months of age ranges from a [[at the]] low end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 10 children, to, ~~at the~~ a high end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 8 children.

67. (Currently Amended) A method of evaluating an educational program according to Claim 61[[28]], wherein the target ratios for an age group of 48 to 60 months of age ranges from a [[at the]] low end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 12 children, to, ~~at the~~ a high end[[, from]] of 1 staff person to 8 children.

68. (New) The method of Claim 11, wherein the communications network is the Internet.

69. (New) The method of Claim 28, wherein the communications network is the Internet.